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Ops Research Student Earns Top Honors in USNI Leadership Contest

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Ops Research Student Earns Top Honors in USNI Leadership Contest

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By PO2 Victoria Ochoa

Lt. John Tanalega, a student in NPS' Department of Operations Research, has been honored by the United States Naval Institute (USNI) for his submission to the annual USNI Leadership Essay Contest. Tanalega won first place in the competition for his essay on fostering a culture of leadership in junior officers, and will be published in a future publication of "Proceedings."

"I'm very glad that it [won], and I hope that it is able to impact the fleet positively. Hopefully my submission will generate meaningful and palliative discussion," said Tanalega.

Tanalega focused his essay on the power of giving junior leaders the opportunity to practice leadership, and to plan and meet the goals of an inspection as opposed to being micromanaged and being told exactly what to do every step of the way.

"A lot of what we do in the Navy is gearing towards getting ready for inspections, getting ready to deploy, getting ready to deploy as an individual ship and with a strike group. So much that we do is to try to get that perfect inspection, that perfect training event," said Tanalega. "But our perfectionism has a dark side where, in our efforts to have a perfect inspection, we are pretty much micromanaging from more senior levels to the ship level, and then the ship level to the individual division and departments."

Tanalega expressed his thoughts on equipping junior officers, petty officers and others in leadership positions with the right attitude to assume those roles properly and to fulfill the mission, rather than focus on just passing inspections.

"Senior leadership all comes from a culture where they were encouraged to practice their own initiative," added Tanalega. "When they get to positions of leadership later on, they are not only fostering that environment of initiative within their own commands, but also they are able to act more independently."

Tanalega's vision of trusting junior officers with the responsibility of becoming proficient leaders, and guiding their peers, is an undertaking that could be of great benefit in day-to-day operations for Sailors Navy-wide.